

THE THINKING
TRAVELLER

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**Forte San
Giorgio**
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Forte San Giorgio

CAPRAIA ISLAND

Tuscan Archipelago

A stunning new property in a unique new destination: welcome to Forte San Giorgio on the island of Capraia.

🛏 11 bedrooms 🚿 10 bathrooms

The very top property available for rent in the Tuscan Archipelago, Forte San Giorgio is a luxurious, fascinating and utterly beguiling addition to our exclusive collection of Italian villas.

Over a decade of painstaking restoration has brought Forte San Giorgio back to life, and the impeccable taste and historical-architectonic sensitivity of its owners is evident at every turn. The result is awe-inspiring.

thethinkingtraveller.com/fortesangiorgio

WHY WE LOVE IT...

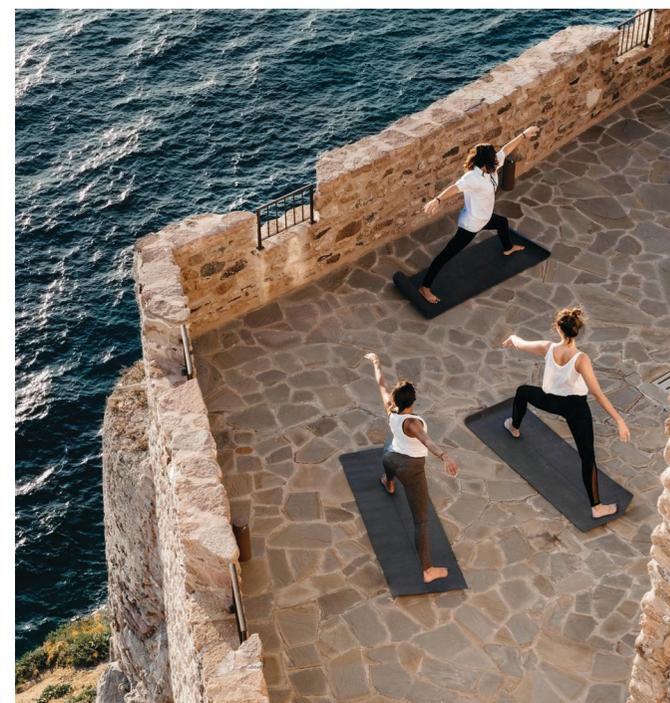
- Stunning sea views
- Two infinity pools
- Space galore inside and out

SERVICE AND AMENITIES

- Accommodates 21
- Daily maid service
- Mid-week linen change
- Private chef
- Garden gate beach/sea access

“When we received the first email from the owners, proposing for us to consider Forte San Giorgio for our portfolio, we understood immediately that it was a truly unique property, and immediately booked a trip to Capraia. Huw and I fell totally in love with it. Not just with the fort, which is simply amazing, but with the island, absolutely fascinating and unspoilt, and the vision that the owners had for it. It lends itself perfectly to wellness and culinary retreats and special celebrations. We have no doubt that our clients will share our passion for it and find that it is the perfect place for a very special holiday with a large family or group of friends.”

ROSSELLA BEAUGIÉ, FOUNDER OF THE THINKING TRAVELLER



THE AREA

Capraia is an eco-friendly paradise at the heart of the Tuscan Archipelago National Park. Its surrounding waters are a sanctuary for a wide variety of marine life, including sperm whales and dolphins, while the (virtually) car-free island is rich in flora and fauna. Capraia's Smart Island Project, which has won several sustainability awards, aims at creating a self-sufficient circular economy.

Paths and ancient mule tracks lead out of Il Paese and Il Porto, criss-crossing the island and taking walkers deep into the island's unspoilt natural habitat. 95% of the island is wild and untouched and the interior is rich in heathers, grasses, euphorbia, wild lavender, sea lillies, myrtle bushes and so much more. A wide variety of birds come to nest on the island, honey buzzards hover overhead, and the scented air is filled with a dreamlike serenity.

Apart from walking, the best way to discover Capraia is by boat. The coastline is extraordinarily beautiful and various, with towering cliffs, gorgeous rocky coves, numerous grottoes and transparent waters. There is one sandy beach on Capraia, at Cala Mortolla in the northeast. It's only accessible by boat and there's a water taxi service from the port.





The Story

Created by Pisans, blessed by a storm-tossed Pope, flattened by pirates, rebuilt by a bank, stared at by Columbus, possessed by Nelson, frowned at by Napoleon, ravaged by the sea... a tomb, a prison, a disco, a love child... the biography of Forte San Giorgio is some story.

It is likely that the rocky outcrop on which the present Forte stands has always been a point of refuge for an island community threatened by marauders from the sea. The earliest remains of a formal fortification date from the beginning of the 13th century. At this time all the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago belonged to Pisa, one of the major city-states of medieval Italy. Defended by locals (led on one occasion by a warrior priest) and perhaps reinforced by a small garrison, the Pisan fortress was sufficiently strong to withstand small-scale raids by pirates. In 1504 and 1506 it beat off two such attacks. The Ottoman commander Turgut Reis (1485–1565) – Dragut to his foes and labelled ‘a merciless pirate’ – launched an attack on Capraia which began on Sunday 6 June 1540, and in four days Dragut had smashed his way in, set the place on fire and carried off the terrified inhabitants for the slave markets of North Africa. Out of Dragut’s fire, Forte San Giorgio was born.

For a while Capraia had been in the hands of the city-state of Genoa, which had replaced Pisa as the leading Christian power in the Ligurian and Tyrrhenian Seas. More specifically, the task of governing Capraia had passed to the staggeringly wealthy Compere di San Giorgio (Bank of St George), the world’s oldest chartered bank, whose activities had become virtually indistinguishable from those of the Genoese state. Capraia’s position gave it a vital strategic importance in the defence of Genoa. So, to ensure that it would not again fall into enemy hands, after taking back control of the island in the summer of 1540 the Genoese set about updating its defences.



The first step was to replace the ruined Pisan fortress with a vastly superior castle. The task was supervised by Captain Genesio da Quarto. From Genoa he brought with him stonemasons, craftsmen and 104 soldiers. Surprisingly, he also had Genoese stone ferried over from the mainland – he didn't think Capraia's volcanic rock strong enough for castle-building. Owing to inclement weather and the constant fear of pirate attack, construction took over a year, but when completed and armed with up-to-date cannon, Forte San Giorgio stood as a striking symbol of Genoese power.

The relatively uneventful history of the castle over the next two centuries is testament to both its strength – its defences were never seriously challenged – and the gradual lessening of the threat from the Ottoman Turks as their empire slid slowly into a long and painful decline. By 1682, we are told, the Forte housed eleven soldiers, a handful of families and a few widows. In other words, it was more a militarised boarding house than a defensive stronghold. The presence of the local church within the walls continued to give it local importance.

In 1768, Genoa sold Corsica (and Capraia) to France, and the following year the islands were declared a province of France. Initially, the island was used as a base for French warships, pressuring the islanders into siding with the revolutionaries during the French Revolution. This set the scene for the Forte to pass into English hands for the first time. In 1796, furious that Capraia was allowing French warships to shelter in its harbour, Sir Gilbert Elliot, the British commander in the region, wrote, I have judged expedient to take possession of the Fort and Island of Capraja in the name of His Majesty... The British flag must be raised on the Fort and on the Towers. It was duly done. And the officer responsible for the operation? None other than the up-and-coming Captain Horatio Nelson. Barely a month after the island was surrendered to the British, the Royal Navy came under serious strategic pressure in the region and the British withdrew. They would not return to the Forte for two and a half centuries.



The Forte was reconstructed by the efforts of Alfredo d'Andrade, whose doughty persistence resulted in the building being listed as a National Monument of considerable architectural and artistic merit. Finding a place for Capraia's Forte in the same basket as Rome's Forum, Florence's Duomo, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa was quite some achievement. In the period 1908–1948, four further owners came and went. None of them was prepared to invest the sort of money needed to secure the building's long-term future. In the 1920s and '30s, the Sala Sant' Antonio served as a summer dormitory for troupes of Balilla, the Italian Fascist youth organisation. The Germans, who recognised the Forte's strategic importance as a lookout post, occupied it for a short while during the later stages of World War II. Back in private hands in the 1950s, the increasingly dilapidated Forte was run as a hotel. The 1970s saw the Sala Sant' Antonio come briefly alive as the island's disco.

Early in the new millennium, the Forte San Giorgio Company bought the building and, with help from the state, undertook to restore and preserve its ancient fabric. To get its money back, the company planned to convert the building into a complex of seven or eight luxury apartments.

At this point, the present owners came sailing by...



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